Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina

Motets for the Season of Christmas

for Five, Six, and Eight Voices

The Palestrina Choir

Michael Harrison, director

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GIOVANNI PIERLUIGI DA PALESTRINA

MOTETS FOR THE SEASON OF CHRISTMAS

for Five, Six, and Eight Voices

In this program, the story of Christmas unfolds through the sublime music of the late-Renaissance master Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (c.1525-1594). Advent, the time of preparation for the coming of Christ, is represented by the first four motets. The Nativity is celebrated in the next five works, while the last four are in honor of Epiphany, the manifestation of Christ to the Magi and to the world. The music was selected and edited by the director from five books of Palestrina motets originally published in 1569, 1572, 1575, 1584, and 1593.

The thirteen motets illustrate a range of Palestrina's compositional techniques. Perhaps most striking at first hearing are the two double-chorus motets, ***Hodie Chri*stus *natus est*** and ***Surge, illuminare***. These works, with their alternation of phrases between the two choirs and emphatic passages where all eight voices sing together, are dramatic by nature. The text-setting is largely syllabic, the texture predominantly chordal, and the often-repeated phrases tend to be brief. While ***Surge*** uses the same voicing in both choirs, ***Hodie*** effectively contrasts a high-

voiced choir with a lower-voiced one. ***Canite tuba***, ***O admirabile commercium***, and ***O magnum mysterium*** all share stylistic traits with the double-chorus works. Like them, they are clear-cut in form and musically accessible. The five or six voices frequently divide into various smaller combinations to produce the illusion of alternating choirs.

The remaining eight motets are constructed largely by means of imitative counterpoint, a technique whereby a phrase of text is taken up by each voice in turn, using the same, or similar, melodic material. The process is then repeated for every new line of text, but with a new motive each time. These different sections, called points of imitation, usually overlap in the aural equivalent of an interlocking puzzle. The order in which the voices enter, the number of text repetitions, and the literalness of the motivic imitation is all variable, giving the composer a great deal of freedom. On occasion, Palestrina also varies the texture by inserting chordal passages of greater or lesser length (***Deus tu conversus*** and ***Rex Melchior***, for example). In contrast to the double-chorus works, and those related to them, these pieces are dominated by linear, not chordal writing. The phrases are longer and the setting of text less often syllabic. There are fewer strong cadences; many are weak or deceptive, blurring the formal delineations and creating an aspect of seamlessness.

Two of the motets contain a canon, a strict form of counterpoint in which one voice follows another in exact imitation at a prescribed temporal and intervallic distance. The canon in ***Cum ortus fuerit sol***, between the quintus (bass I) and sextus (alto I), closely paraphrases the Vesper antiphon chants. Although much of the same melodic material appears at various points in the other four parts, the voices of the canon are discernible by their consistently slow, steady pace, and by the longer pauses they take between phrases. This, and the full, rich choral texture, lends the piece an archaic flavor. The canon in ***Sancta et immaculata***, between the tenor and quintus (alto I), is only a little less rhythmically active than the other parts, and blends well into the overall texture.

The beginning of the secunda pars ("Benedicta tu in mulieribus") paraphrases the corresponding section of the ***Ave Maria*** chant.

Five of the six two-part motets (all but ***Cum ortus***) are composed in responsory form, derived from the Responsory, a type of chant consisting of two sections, Respond and Verse. In chant performance, after the Respond and Verse are presented once, a return is made to a point indicated within the Respond, which is then sung to its conclusion. In the motets, this translates as an AB/CB form, in which AB is the ***prima pars*** and CB is the ***secunda pars***. A is the opening part of the Respond, C is the Verse, and B is the part of the Respond that is repeated. The B section will contain the same music both times, although the divisi voices may exchange lines upon its return in the ***secunda pars***. ***Hierusalem, cito veniet*** is unusual in that the repetition is not literal. Instead, Palestrina uses the same material, but puts it together in a different way.

The variety in the formal construction of the motets is matched by the variety of musical moods used to express their texts. Perhaps the centuries-old emphasis on Palestrina's music as a contrapuntal exemplar has been a barrier to recognizing the full measure of its emotional content. In these motets, Palestrina has written music that expresses agitation, serenity, hope, confidence, wonder, joy, and more. This is music not merely for the intellect, but for the heart and spirit as well.

- Michael Harrison

The Palestrina Choir wishes to extend thanks and appreciation to Joellen Brassfield, Michael Buckley, Jack Harrison and Carolyn Harrison, whose generous support helped make this recording possible. We would also like to thank St. Paul's Parish, K Street, Washington, D.C. (Fr. Andrew L. Sloane, Rector) for providing us with rehearsal, concert and recording space, and its Music Director, Jeffrey Smith, for his kind assistance to us over the years.

TEXTS AND ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

Hierusalem, cito veniet

Hierusalem, cito veniet salus tua:	*Jerusalem, thy salvation shall come quickly:*
quare merore consumeris?	*Why art thou consumed with grief?*
Nunquid consiliarius non est tibi,	*Is there no counselor for thee,*
quia innovavit te dolor;	*that sorrow hath overtaken thee?*
salvabo te et liberabo te;	*I will save thee, and I will set thee free;*
noli timere.	*fear thou not.*
Ego enim sum Dominus Deus tuus,	*For I am the Lord thy God,*
sanctus Israel, et redemptor tuus;	*the Holy One of Israel, and thy Redeemer.*
salvabo te et liberabo te;	*I will save thee, and I will set thee free;*
noli timere.	*fear thou not.*

Responsory 1, 2nd Sunday of Advent; Micah 4:8,9, Isaiah 43:3

Deus tu conversus

Deus tu conversus vivificabis nos,	*O God, thou in turning wilt quicken us:*
et plebs tua laetabitur in te:	*and thy people shall rejoice in thee.*
Ostende nobis Domine misericordiam tuam,	*Show us, O Lord, thy mercy,*
et salutare tuum da nobis.	*and grant us thy salvation.*

Offertory Antiphon, 2nd Sunday of Advent; Psalm 85:6,7

Veni, Domine

Veni, Domine, et noli tardare:	*Come, O Lord, and tarry not:*
relaxa facinora plebi tuae,	*loosen the bonds of thy people,*
et revoca dispersos in terram suam.	*and recall the dispersed to their own land.*
Excita, Domine, potentiam tuam, et veni,	*Stir up, O Lord, thy power, and come,*
ut salvos nos facias,	*that thou mayest save us,*
et revoca dispersos in terram suam.	*and recall the dispersed to their own land.*

Responsory 7, 3rd Sunday of Advent; founded on Habaccuk 2:3

Responsory 3, Ember Saturday in Advent; Psalm 80:3

Canite tuba

Canite tuba in Sion,	*Blow ye the trumpet in Zion,*
quia prope est dies Domini,	*for the day of the Lord is at hand:*
ecce venit ad salvandum nos.	*Behold, he cometh to save us.*
Erunt prava in directa,	*The crooked shall be made straight,*
et aspera in vias planas:	*and the rough places plain:*
Veni Domine, et noli tardare. Alleluia	*Come, O Lord, and do not tarry. Alleluia.*
Rorate coeli desuper,	*Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above,*
et nubes pluant justum;	*and let the clouds pour down Righteousness,*
aperiatur terra, et germinet salvatorem.	*Let the earth open, and bud forth the Saviour.*
Ostende nobis Domine, misericordiam tuam,	*Show us, O Lord, thy mercy:*
et salutare tuum da nobis.	*and grant us thy salvation.*
Veni Dmonie, et noli tardare. Alleluia.	*Come, O Lord, and do not tarry. Alleluia*

Advent IV: Psalm Antiphons 1 and 3 at Lauds; Joel 2:1, Isaiah 40:4

Psalm Antiphon 1 at Lauds; Isaiah 45:5, Psalm 85:8, Habaccuk 2:3

Cum ortus fuerit sol

Cum ortus fuerit sol de caelo	*When the sun shall have risen in the heavens,*
videbitis Regem regum	*ye shall see the King of kings*
procedentem a Patre,	*proceeding from the Father,*
tanquam sponsus de thalamo suo.	*as a bridegroom out of his chamber.*
Rex pacificus magnificatus est,	*The King who maketh peace is highly exalted:*
cujus vultum desiderat universa terra.	*for whose countenance all the earth longeth.*

1 Vespers of Christmas: Antiphon on the Magnificat; Antiphon 1 on the Psalms, Psalm 19:5, 1 Kings 10:23-24

Hodie Christus natus est

Hodie Christus natus est: Noe!	*Today the Christ is born, Nowell!*
Hodie Salvator apparuit: Noe!	*Today hath a Saviour appeared, Nowell!*
Hodie in terra canunt Angeli,	*Today on earth angels are singing,*
laetantur, Archangeli: Noe!	*archangels are rejoicing, Nowell!*
Hodie exultant justi, dicentes:	*Today the righteous exult, saying:*
Gloria in excelsis Deo. Noe!	*Glory to God in the highest. Nowell!*

Christmas Day: Antiphon on the Magnificat, II Vespers

O admirabile commercium

O admirabile commercium!	*O wondrous interchange!*
Creator generis humani	*The creator of humankind,*
animatum corpus sumens	*taking upon him a living body,*
de Virgine nasci dignatus est;	*vouchsafed to be born of a Virgin:*
et procedens homo sine semine,	*and proceeding forth as man without seed*
largitus est nobis suam deitatem.	*hath bestowed upon us his divinity.*

Octave Day of Christmas: Antiphon 1 at Lauds

Sancta et immaculata

Sancta et immaculata virginitas,	*O holy and unspotted maidenhood,*
quibus te laudibus efferam nescio:	*with what praises to extol thee I know not:*
quia quem coeli capere non poterant	*for him whom the heavens could not contain*
tuo gremio contulisti.	*thou barest in thy womb.*
Benedicta tu in mulieribus,	*Blessed art thou amongst women,*
et benedictus fructus ventris tui:	*and blessed is the fruit of thy womb:*
quia quem coeli capere non poterant	*for him whom the heavens could not contain*
tuo gremio contulisti.	*thou barest in thy womb.*

Christmas Matins Responsory 7, cf. 1 Kings 8:27, Luke 1

O magnum mysterium

O magnum mysterium	*O great the mystery*
et admirabile sacramentum	*and wondrous the sign,*
ut animalia viderent Dominum natum	*that beasts should behold the Lord new born,*
jacentem in praesepio.	*lying in a manger.*

Natum vidimus, et choros Angelorum
collaudantes Dominum. Alleluia.

We have seen the newborn, and choirs of angels,
praising the Lord together. Alleluia.

Quem vidistis, pastores?
Dicite: annunciate nobis, quis apparuit?
Natum vidimus, et choros Angelorum
collaudantes Dominum. Alleluia

Whom beheld ye, O shepherds?
Say, tell us, who hath appeared?
We have seen the newborn, and choirs of angels,
praising the Lord together. Alleluia.

Christmas Matins Responsories 5 and 3

Stella quam viderant Magi

Stella quam viderant Magi in oriente
antecedebat eos, donec venirent
ad locum ubi puer erat.
Videntes autem eam,
gavisi sunt gaudio magno.

The star that the Magi saw in the East
went before them until they came
to the place where the child was.
And seeing it,
they rejoiced with great joy.

Epiphany Matin Responsory 9, Epiphany Processional Responsory

Reges Tharsis

Reges Tharsis et insulae
munera offerent:
reges Arabum et Saba dona adducent:
et adorabunt eum
omnes reges terrae
omnes gentes servient ei.

The kings of Tarshish and of the isles
shall give presents:
The kings of Arabia and Sheba shall bring gifts:
And all the kings of the earth
shall fall down before him,
All nations shall do him service.

Epiphany, Offertory Antiphon: Psalm 72:10,11

Rex Melchior

Rex Melchior, Rex Gaspar,
Rex Balthasar,
rogamus vos per Regem regum,
quem vagientem in cunis
videre meruistis,
ut compatiamini tribulationibus nostris.

O King Melchior, O King Caspar,
O King Balthazar:
we entreat you by the King of kings
whom, weeping in the manger,
you were worthy to behold,
that ye may have compassion on our tribulations.

Source not known

Surge, illuminare

Surge, illuminare, Hierusalem,
quia venit lumen tuum,
et gloria Domini super te orta est.
Quia ecce tenebrae operient terram,
et caligo populos:
super te autem orietur Dominus,
et gloria ejus in te videbitur.

Arise, shine, O Jerusalem,
for thy light is come,
and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.
For behold, a shadow shall cover the earth
and thick darkness the peoples:
but the Lord shall arise upon thee,
and his glory shall be seen in thee.

Isaiah 60:1-2

Translations and liturgical citations by John Uhrig

THE PALESTRINA CHOIR

Soprano	Alto
Joellen Brassfield	Cynthia Beck
Evanne Browne	Jonathan Biran
Joan McFarland	Susan Kerner-Hoeg
Clare Michaud	Francine Krasowska
Lisa Shumate	Rachel Malone
	Susan Marquis

Tenor	Bass
Mark Fittipaldi	Steven Kerchoff
Rollin Marquis	Tom Kramer
Robert Reynolds	Guy Lushin
Martin Rosol	Stephen Pearcy
Robert Thompson	John Uhrig
Steven York	

The Palestrina Choir, of Washington, D.C., was formed in 1986 to present rarely heard masterpieces of sixteenth-century liturgical music, with an emphasis on the works of Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina. To date, the choir has performed sixteen Masses, over seventy motets, and ten hymns of its namesake. It has devoted entire programs to works of Clemens non Papa, Lassus, Victoria, and Byrd, and performed Masses and motets by twenty of Palestrina's predecessors. In recent years the Palestrina Choir has also begun to present historically-influenced works by later composers, such as Liszt's Missa Choralis and Rheinberger's Cantus Missae, op.109.

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